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Rick Mofina

REASON TO READ:

COLD FEAR and COLD HEARTED COLUMNISTS

There are books written, it seems, to be read at cabins in the heat of summer when the mind is less than fully occupied by work and the temperature has rendered it incapable of pondering the weighty matters of the world -though the two mentioned here hold particular appeal because they are about various aspects of my work world.

First, there's Rick Mofina -whose last book - *If Angels Fall* - I quite enjoyed even though it rekindled my fear of the dark and I had to sleep with the hall light on. Still, I snapped up his latest book, published just in time to head to my cabin. He follows the same thriller themes -- a missing child, horrified parents, shocking histories and deeply disturbed maniacs on the loose; and reprises some of the same characters - a hardened FBI agent and a no-longer depressed and now recovering alcoholic newspaper reporter.

*Cold Fear* is set on a camping trip in the Rocky Mountains – in Glacier National Park - and the story straddles both sides of the border. Mofina is at his best when he fleshes out the character of the journalist (he should know, he's still plying the trade) and when he hones in on the phenomenon of the media fuelling the fire and setting the agenda for the police, the FBI, even the courts and government - not always with the best of intentions and seldom with favourable results. In fact, *Cold Fear* is billed by the publisher as "a story torn from the headlines" and much of the narrative is about newspaper deadlines, newspaper wars, accuracy, tabloid versus mainstream journalism and the disappearing

distinctions between the two. The age old battle and symbiotic relationship between network TV news and the world of print and the inevitable clash between local papers and big city reporters who arrive on the scene in search of a story are also accountable much of the appeal for me. Mofina, who is fast becoming one of Canada's favourite thriller writers (If Angels Fall was shortlisted for the Arthur Ellis Award), emerged from the relative obscurity of the crowded world of journalism just a few years ago. His reportage has appeared in the New York Times, Reader's Digest, The Moscow Times and various magazines – nothing to sneeze at - but now his novels( that also offer some insightful criticism of the journalistic world) are now on every drugstore bookrack and airport bookstore across North America. But you don't have to be a reporter to enjoy the well-crafted story.

There is also an insiderish quality to my second choice this week. The Columnist by Jeffrey Frank, a senior editor at The New Yorker is also great read. In an earlier incarnation, Frank worked at The Washington Post and the now defunct Washington Star and only a person who has been part of the media world – and its self-important inner circle – could have written this book and captured so accurately the flawed character of a self-absorbed, pompous, bow-tied journalist whose arrogance and ambition eventually costs him several marriages, his family, friendships, respect and his job. It's journalism's version of Primary Colors in that it exposes the foibles of journalists who - like the politicians they write about - become celebrities and then come to believe their status makes them immune to the consequences of their actions.